

between what goes on in Springfield, Massachusetts, connected to Washington, DC, connected not just to Ireland but what happens half a world away.

You're lucky enough to have a person like that in Congress. I hope you'll leave him there forever, and I hope between now and November you will share some of these thoughts with your friends not only in Massachusetts but in other States.

This is a very important opportunity for the American people to make a good decision. In my lifetime we've never had a chance like this to build the future of our dreams for our children—never. We've never had so much prosperity and social progress with the absence of internal crisis or external threat. It may not roll around again for another 50 years, so you make the most of it. And meanwhile, take care of him.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:06 p.m. at the Phoenix Park Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Neal's wife, Maureen Neal; Father William B. Leahy, president, Boston College; and former Prime Minister John Major and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. Representative Neal is a candidate for reelection in Massachusetts' Second Congressional District.

Remarks on the Children's Health Insurance Program

September 29, 2000

Thank you very much. Thank you. Good morning. Thank you, Debbie. She did a good job, didn't she? Let's give her another hand. *[Applause]* Thank you. I would also like to ask the rest of her family to stand: her husband, Chris; and her son, Brian; her daughter, Melissa. Let's give them a big hand there. *[Applause]* There they are. Thank you for being here.

I also want to thank the advocates, whom Secretary Shalala mentioned, and three elected officials who have strongly, strongly supported our efforts. First, in the Congress, Representative Sandy Levin and Representative Robert Underwood, thank you for your help. And Linda Cropp from the DC City Council, thank you for being here.

Let me announce, before I get to the subject at hand, that I just signed the continuing resolution which Congress sent me yesterday, necessary because our fiscal year ends tomorrow and we have to have a stopgap funding measure for the Government to run. But I hope we can now pass the remaining appropriations bills. September has come and gone, and Congress still has obligations to fulfill.

These children behind me have been back in school for a month, but we still don't have the first assignment turned in from Congress, ensuring that our schools have the resources to meet the high standards we expect of them.

Now, let's get back to this story. Deborah's story is all too common in America. There are millions of our fellow citizens, like her and her husband, who get up every day, go to work, play by the rules, and still have a tough time finding affordable health insurance.

For 8 years now, Secretary Shalala and Hillary—who I wish could be here today for this happy announcement—and I have worked as hard as we could to make sure families get more health insurance. Yesterday we had more evidence that our approach is working. The census data shows that the number of uninsured Americans fell by 1.7 million in 1999, the first major drop in a dozen years.

Nearly two-thirds of these newly insured are children, like many of those who are here with us today. Since I signed the CHIP program into law, 2.5 million children have been able to get insurance through this program. In our budget, Vice President Gore and I have proposed a family care initiative, which would take care of the second part of Debbie's statement. It would expand CHIP to cover the parents of eligible children.

If we do this, we could cover a quarter of all the uninsured children and families in America and, I might add, those that are most at risk and need the health insurance most. Parents like Deborah and Chris Bredbenner know what a difference health insurance can make—you just heard it—not just in emergencies but for routine care.

Consider the child who doesn't get treated for an ear infection, who might suffer permanent hearing loss and, certainly, while in pain, would have a harder time learning in school. Consider the toll of untreated asthma, which will cause American students, listen to this, to miss 10 million school days this year alone.

That's why we need to keep pushing forward until all our children are covered. To help accomplish this, the Department of Health and Human Services is awarding \$700,000 in grants today, to develop new and even more effective ways to identify and to enroll uninsured children. These grants will be used not only to get children enrolled but to keep them enrolled, so they can get the care they need. They will build on our recent success in improving outreach and enrollment around America.

If you look at how the States are doing with CHIP, you'll see that those with the best outreach programs have the most success in boosting the number of children covered. States like Indiana, Ohio, and Maine have done a remarkable job. I hope others will look to them for leadership.

There was a story in one of our major papers yesterday, outlining the dramatic differences in enrollments from State to State, and making it clear that the States that had the most systematic, determined effort and a strong leader, got kids enrolled, and those that didn't try as hard, didn't. This is a simple matter of systematic effort and real dedication.

I also hope that every working parent searching for children's health insurance will call the toll free number on everyone of these children's T-shirts: 1-877-KIDS-NOW.

We need to remember that the rising number of uninsured didn't develop overnight; it won't disappear overnight. In some ways, it reminds me of the challenges we faced when Vice President Gore and I took office in January of 1993. Some people said there was nothing we could do to stop the rising tide of red ink. The numbers on the national debt clock in New York were flashing so fast, people's eyes were glazing over.

But we made some tough choices: we cut some spending; we raised some money; we invested in the American people and elimi-

nated hundreds of programs we didn't need and together, we turned a \$290 billion annual deficit into \$230 billion of surplus this year. That didn't happen by chance. It happened by choice. That's what is happening now with health coverage. If we make the right decisions, if we make smart choices and see them through, we can reduce the number of uninsured people in America.

First, as I said, it's very important to recognize that the laws on the books, we believe, would enable us to ensure up to two-thirds of the uninsured children in America—8 of the 12 million—if every State did everything possible to enroll children in the CHIP program and got those who are Medicaid-eligible into Medicaid.

Second, we ought to expand CHIP eligibility to the parents of these children. It's very important.

Third, we ought to focus on another group of people that are having great difficulty getting health care, those who are over 55, but not 65, therefore are not old enough for Medicare, and many of them have taken early retirement or lost their jobs, or they're working in a place where the employer doesn't offer health insurance coverage.

We think they ought to be able to buy into Medicare, not to weaken the Medicare program. Our proposal is, give them a tax credit to defray some of the cost of buying into Medicare, so that we would, in effect, cut the cost for them of buying into Medicare but get the whole amount of money into Medicare, so that it would in no way, shape, or form weaken the financial stability of Medicare. This is very, very important.

And I might say to you, we ought to do this now, because this group is only going to get larger as the baby boomers age. Next year, exhibit A—[laughter]—the oldest of the baby boomers will be 55. For 28 years after that, you will have some portion of the baby boom generation in that 55- to 65-year-old age group. It's very, very important that we do this.

Next, Congress should pass our tax credit for small business, to strengthen their hand in negotiating quality affordable health insurance options for their employees. A lot of businesses try to offer health insurance, but as you just heard Debbie say, the cost to

them is so high, and they have to pass so much of the cost on to their employees, that many of the employees can't afford it, even if it's offered.

Next, Congress should restore Medicaid benefits to the most vulnerable of our legal immigrants, including children. A few days ago, a bipartisan coalition on the House Commerce Committee voted to pass this important measure, and I applaud them for doing so. Surely now that the committee has supported it, we can work together to restore these benefits and do it this year.

Finally, there are some other items on our agenda. The American people still need Congress to pass a Medicare prescription drug benefit, a \$3,000 tax credit for long-term care, very important for families that are caring for family members who are disabled or aging, who have long-term care needs, and a strong Patients' Bill of Rights.

When Hillary and Donna and I started working on this back in 1993, we proposed a solution that would have covered all Americans, would have the Patients' Bill of Rights, would have the provisions of the Kennedy-Kassebaum bill, would take care of children who age out of foster care. And it was too much for the system to accommodate at once, so we've gone back, piece-by-piece, trying to achieve that.

We have now the children's health insurance coverage. We've taken care of the kids that age out of foster care. We passed a bill that protects you if you get sick or if you change jobs from losing your health insurance. But we need for people to make maximum use of this law. Every child in this country, like the children standing here and like the Bredbenner kids, who is eligible for CHIP, ought to be in it. The parents who need it, ought to be able to buy into the program. We can afford this now. It's quite manageable. And we absolutely know there are only two ways that you can provide health insurance for working people on modest incomes. There either has to be some sort of subsidy from the Government, or the employers have to provide it, or you have to have a combination of both. Next, we need to deal with the 55- to 65-year-old age group. And finally, we need to deal with the fact that there are so many of our seniors who

don't have prescription drug coverage. And we need to deal with the long-term care challenge facing our country. And we need to pass this Patients' Bill of Rights that we've been working on since 1994. This is all very, very important.

The good news is, we know this approach will work. We know that the number of uninsured is going down, and I might say, we don't have the figures yet, but we know there are several hundred thousand children who, because of the CHIP program, have been enrolled in Medicaid.

So we just have to keep working on this. So I implore you to make sure every State in this country is making the most of the laws that are here and to do everything you can to get Congress, in this time of unprecedented prosperity, that enables us to do things—we could not do this 6 years ago, because we did not have the money. We now have a surplus. We can do this. We still have a reasonably sized tax cut to help people with education and child care and saving for retirement and pay this country out of debt in 2012. We have the money to keep America's economy going, to get the country out of debt, and to provide more health insurance to families like those that are represented by these children here today. We ought to do it and do it now.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Debbie Bredbenner, whose two children are covered by the Children's Health Insurance Program but who could not afford health insurance for herself.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee/Democratic Business Council Luncheon

September 29, 2000

Thank you. I don't know what I feel about getting all those golf balls. [Laughter] Is he telling me I should quit working altogether? He should at least tell me that he expects me to live long enough to lose all of them. [Laughter]

Thank you very much, and thank you for the warm welcome. I want to thank John